Polo's Lasting Reach

Weigh what one travel account changed and what it could not prove

AWH.C.10.5.G "Evaluate the impact of Marco Polo's travels to India and China."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two details that could change a European reader's view of Asia, circle one limit of Polo's account, and number one sentence that best states his overall impact.

A Journey Becomes a Book

1 In 1271, Marco Polo left Venice with his father and uncle and traveled east across Asia. They reached the Yuan dynasty's court in China, ruled by Kublai Khan. Polo later claimed that he served the khan and traveled through parts of the empire. His account described crowded cities, busy waterways, paper money, and coal used for fuel. These details presented China as a place with large markets and systems that many European readers had never encountered. Yet Polo was not the first European to visit Asia, and historians debate some details of his claimed work for the khan.

2 On the journey home by sea, Polo passed through the Indian Ocean and described places along India's coast. He wrote of ports where merchants exchanged goods such as pepper and precious stones. The ships and trade routes he described connected Asian ports to buyers far beyond a single kingdom. Some sections of his account drew on what other travelers told him, rather than on places he had seen himself. For European readers, these descriptions suggested that India's coastal trade could supply valuable goods, but they did not provide a reliable, step-by-step plan for reaching or buying from every port.

3 After returning to Venice, Polo was captured during a war with Genoa. While imprisoned, he told his story to a fellow prisoner, who helped turn it into a book often called *The Travels of Marco Polo*. Copies circulated in Europe, carrying accounts of China's wealth and India's trading ports to readers who would never make the journey. His book helped broaden European ideas about Asian geography and commerce; later travelers, including Christopher Columbus, read it. However, Polo did not create the trade networks he described or single-handedly cause European voyages. His lasting impact lay chiefly in spreading information, mixed with uncertainty, across cultures.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How might Polo's description of China have changed a European reader's expectations? Use two details from the passage.

2. What did Polo's account of India's ports suggest about trade, and what could it not tell a merchant with certainty?

3. Which was a stronger impact of Polo's travels: creating trade routes or changing European readers' understanding of Asia? Defend your choice with evidence.

4. How should the secondhand parts of Polo's account affect a historian's judgment of its impact? Explain using a detail from the passage.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

In five sentences, advise a Venetian merchant who cannot travel to Asia on one way to use Polo's account. Include a detail about China, a detail about India, and one reason to check his claims before making a decision.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · AWH.C.10.5.G

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two details that could change a European reader's view of Asia, circle one limit of Polo's account, and number one sentence that best states his overall impact. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How might Polo's description of China have changed a European reader's expectations? Use two details from the passage.	**His descriptions of crowded cities and paper money could lead readers to expect large markets and organized systems in China.**
2	What did Polo's account of India's ports suggest about trade, and what could it not tell a merchant with certainty?	**It suggested that Indian ports traded valuable goods, including pepper and precious stones, through wider networks. It could not give a merchant a reliable plan for reaching or buying from every port.**
3	Which was a stronger impact of Polo's travels: creating trade routes or changing European readers' understanding of Asia? Defend your choice with evidence.	**Changing readers' understanding was the stronger impact. His book circulated descriptions of China and India in Europe, but he did not create the trade networks he described.**
4	How should the secondhand parts of Polo's account affect a historian's judgment of its impact? Explain using a detail from the passage.	**A historian can recognize that the book spread ideas about Asia while checking its claims carefully, since some descriptions came from other travelers rather than from places Polo saw.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Buy pepper from traders who already reach Asian markets rather than trying to sail to India yourself. Polo described Indian ports where merchants exchanged pepper and precious stones, suggesting that these goods moved through active networks. His reports of China's crowded cities and paper money point to large markets farther east. Because some of his descriptions came from other travelers, do not assume that every port or price is exactly as he reported. Use his book to identify possibilities, then verify supplies and costs with merchants you trust.

Accept supported judgments that distinguish the account's influence on European readers from direct changes to Asian trade. Students may choose different uses for the book if they include both regional details and a sound caution about its reliability.